

Welcome to TechEx '15



TechEx
2015



Orientation for off-campus students: Using Blackboard Collaborate to provide live online orientation

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Background

The current Orientation landscape



Changing administrative, funding and policy positions have impacted on the delivery of orientation

- From Faculty to Central to Faculty
- Minimal funding

The current orientation landscape

- Orientation primarily provided by Faculties and Schools. Supported, coordinated and facilitated by Student Transition & Retention team (including the provision of generic orientation programme elements such as welcome and general sessions, international sessions, tours etc.).
- Strong focus on face-to-face on-campus delivery
- Until 2014, orientation for distance students provided via static web pages and email (delivered by STaR team).

Distance students

Who are they and what do they want?

Post-Census 2015: 2016 of 9282 incoming students were studying fully by distance

Large distance cohorts in undergraduate Education, Arts, Nursing, AMC degrees and post-graduate professional and coursework degrees.

- Time poor
- Working and parenting
- Geographically dispersed including overseas
- Various degrees of internet connectivity
- Diverse demographic

- Recognition
 - Pay fees and want services
 - Appropriately delivered services
- Flexible delivery
 - Not one-size fits all
 - Choice of delivery modes
 - Synchronous and asynchronous
- Content
 - Interactive and engaging
 - Specific to their degree / School / Faculty

What the STaR team can do

...Via distance



Limitations

- Recent Student Centre restructure and consequent reduction in numbers in our team
 - Loss of specialist cohort knowledge (particularly in cohorts containing large numbers of distance students and for cohorts with specialist needs)
 - Loss of technical capacity from within the team
- We can't provide enrolment advice, unit specific information, faculty and school specific information and lots of other services that are typically provided at on-campus orientation.
- Extremely limited budget so no Hollywood solutions

What we can provide

- Advice and information about the generic experience of transitioning to University
- Referral to relevant services such as Faculty Office and other key contacts
- Friendly face and genuine interactive experience
- Demonstration of university systems such as eStudent, MyLO, Office 365
- Take questions on notice



Finding a solution

We needed a tool that could:

- Allow for multiple presenters
- Work for people with limited bandwidth
- Provide visual, aural and written modes
- Be relatively straightforward to use for both presenters and students
- Cheap and accessible for our team and for students.

The logo for Blackboard collaborate is displayed within a purple rectangular border. The word "Blackboard" is in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below it, the word "collaborate" is in a smaller, black sans-serif font. To the right of "collaborate" is a purple double-right-pointing arrow symbol (»).

Our first attempt Sem 2, 2014

Planning & Preparation



- The project team: A manager, two people with Collaborate experience, plus four advisers with zero experience
- Three hour internal training session on Collaborate
- We offered one session during Orientation week on a week night between 8-9pm
- We invited other relevant staff such as Faculty Officers to participate however they were unavailable.
- We promoted the session via our usual channels including web, email and Facebook
- Encouraged students to register via web form and FB
- Encouraged students to prepare by reading instructions
- Concurrently launched a new Facebook page for distance
- Promoted the webinar internally to all student facing staff
- Prepared materials (ppt), script, running order and allocated tasks

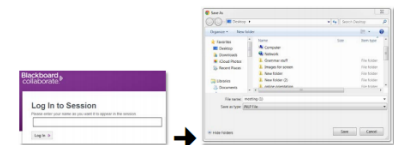


Using Collaborate Web Conferencing

Please visit the room well before the session starts. Web rooms can usually be accessed in the days before a session, and it's a good idea to ensure your computer and audio technology are set up appropriately ahead of time.

You can use this link - <http://bit.ly/bo827> - to check whether your computer is compatible and whether you have a recent version of Java installed. You can download Java free from <http://www.java.com/en/>. (Please note! When you install Java, it offers to install the Ask Toolbar and helpfully provides you with a pre-ticked box [X] saying you agree. You do not want this toolbar. Nobody wants this toolbar. Un-tick the box.)

Click the link to the session. You will go to a log-in page. Enter your name and click "Log in".



Our first attempt Sem 2, 2014

D(elivery) Day

- We had approximately 40 students register to attend: a small proportion of the potential but a large number for a Collaborate session
- Staff participants were geographically dispersed: some working from home, some in the office and most not in the same room
- The schedule was for a simple three part session:
 - Powerpoint presentation similar to our regular orientation presentation but with a focus on services for distance students
 - A demonstration of web based services such as MyLO etc.
 - Breaking up the participants into cohort based rooms for an interactive question and answer session



Our first attempt Sem 2, 2014

How did it go?

The Good

- Positive feedback from students
- No major catastrophe (we didn't lose power)
- Confidence and experience gained for our team
- From little things, big things grow

The Bad

- Some students who registered were unable to get into the session on the night
- Questions we couldn't answer
- Labour intensive
- A wee bit chaotic
- Timezone difference

The Ugly

- Chipmunk punk
- Connection drop outs
- The Gosling Effect



Our second webinar Sem 1, 2015



- Fewer students registered and participated
- Fewer staff involved
- Much smoother, polished delivery except ...
 - Firewall issues for demonstrations

We were all tucked up in bed
at a reasonable hour!



What next?

Distance orientation in the new world

- Loss of Blackboard Collaborate expertise from our team
- Loss of cohort focus and staff numbers: tightening of our ‘core activities’
- Looking for high value, high penetration interventions for at risk students
- Blackboard Collaborate may not be the right solution for our new world:
 - Requires minimum of three-four staff to deliver online orientation across multiple cohorts
 - Requires a reasonable level of technical proficiency to deliver
 - Significant workload requirements in terms of preparation and delivery
 - Resource intensive in terms of staff, expertise and hours
 - For an interactive experience can reach only a relatively small proportion of our potential audience
- We are aiming to deliver larger scale interventions that require fewer inputs and reach more students (doing more with less).
 - Another platform? New version of Collaborate?